

# CAPC

## Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks

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TO: Members of the Appropriations Committee  
RE: **H.B. No. 7027**, STATE OF CONNECTICUT PROPOSED BUDGET.

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Patricia Saviano, and I am the President of the Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks (hereinafter ðCAPCö). I am also the Chief Clerk of the Danbury Probate Court. CAPC is a voluntary organization comprised of approximately 219 members; which is about seventy-percent (70%) of the total 316 employees in the probate system. Our mission is to further and promote the interest of all probate clerks and court staff in the Connecticut Probate System through professional development, education, the open exchange of ideas, the collection and distribution of information, and advocacy.

On behalf of all members of CAPC, I beseech you to take strong consideration of the administrative budget appropriation for the Probate Courts **because we are an essential core government function that is vital for promoting justice and is critical to the state's safety net**. The Governor's proposed budget falls far short of the \$7.1 million (FY 2017-18) and \$7.4 million (FY 2018-19) needed for the Probate Court system to operate. The gap in funding will leave exposed those who need access to the Probate Courts, who are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society.

By way of background, the Probate Courts in Connecticut are charged with much more than administering decedent or trust assets. The Court also handles over 72 areas, including conservatorships, guardianships for the developmentally disabled, guardianships of children, name changes, determination of parental rights, and adoptions. To illustrate further; an adult child whose parent is suffering from dementia would come to the probate court to be named conservator to help that parent manage their day to day healthcare and finances, a parent whose intellectually disabled child has just turned 18 may come to the probate court to be named their legal guardian in order to continue to make medical decisions on their behalf, or a grandmother may file for guardianship of her grandchild who has no parent available to enroll her in school or bring her to the doctors. These are everyday scenarios faced by the probate courts.

Historically, the probate appropriation pays for many social service functions including, but not limited to; a) conservators for indigent individuals (approximately \$4.6 million); b) specialized service through Regional Children's Probate Courts (6,700 children/\$3.3 million); c) administering Kinship and Respite grants for guardians of children (\$2.0 million); d) legal counsel/attorneys for indigent parties (\$2.5 million) as constitutionally and statutorily mandated; and e) waiver of probate fees and court costs for indigent parties. Another way to think about this is that no general fund money sought is used to pay for the operation of the Probate Courts, those costs are borne entirely by fee revenue and municipal aid.

# *CAPC*

## *Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks*

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The Probate appropriation is needed to cover rising indigency costs and to carry out core court functions that provide a great cost savings to the State of Connecticut.

As a final note, the Probate Courts have already experienced cost savings and reductions in budgetary expenses through a consolidation process that drastically reduced the number of courts. To be blunt, the Probate Court system has already been slimmed down and streamlined to the point where it cannot meet the public's immense needs if cut any further. In recent years, the probate court's caseload has increased as other social services have declined. Despite these ever-growing demands, the Connecticut Probate Courts have always been, and continue to be, there to help and protect those who cannot help and protect themselves. Please keep this in mind in rejecting the Governor's proposed budget as being insufficient to meet the Probate Court system's basic operating needs.

Thank you for your service, time, consideration and support! If you have any questions as to the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Warm Regards,

/s/

Patricia Saviano